

*An Interview with*  
*AL and*  
*LYNN BELLS*

---

*An Oral History produced by*  
*Robert D. McCracken*

Nye County Town History Project  
Nye County, Nevada  
Tonopah  
2009



Alvin "Al" Bells  
2009



Al and Marilyn Bells  
2008

Preface .....	vi
Acknowledgments .....	viii
Introduction .....	x
CHAPTER ONE .....	1
Al and Marilyn discuss their parents and their childhood; growing up in Pasadena; their marriage and life in Pasadena after Al's years in the service; hearing about Pahrump and feeling ready to leave Pasadena; farming in Pahrump, which also served as a home for Marilyn's father; flying between Pahrump and Pasadena; growing crops in Pahrump; subdividing and selling land.	
CHAPTER TWO .....	16
Raising cattle in Pahrump; the Bell children's move to the Pahrump school; growing and ginning cotton.	
CHAPTER THREE .....	23
A discussion of the process of developing a subdivision and selling properties; selling alfalfa; the importance of the Nevada Test Site to Pahrump.	
CHAPTER FOUR .....	31
Memories of some Pahrump residents; plane travel to and from Pahrump; bringing two buffalo to the valley; the burros in Pahrump; how Al keeps an eye on their land; Al and Marilyn discuss their children; road travel in and out of Pahrump in the early days; irrigation in the valley; mesquite trees in the valley and on the Bells' property.	
CHAPTER FIVE .....	45
A tour of the Bells' land—in particular, the mesquite grove; a discussion of the history of Pahrump; remembering some old-timers from Pahrump; weed control in the valley; comments on water rights.	
INDEX .....	56

The Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) engages in interviewing people who can provide firsthand descriptions of the individuals, events, and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are *not* history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiography as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the NCTHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the NCTHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts, and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherence. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often largely unreadable and therefore a waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the NCTHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the *uhs*, *ahs* and other noises with which speech is often sprinkled;
- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context;
- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered but have been added to render the text intelligible; and
- e. make every effort to correctly spell the names of all individuals and places, recognizing that an occasional word may be misspelled because no authoritative source on its correct spelling was found.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As project director, I would like to express my deep appreciation to those who participated in the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP). It was an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to obtain oral histories from so many wonderful individuals. I was welcomed into many homes—in many cases as a stranger—and was allowed to share in the recollection of local history. In a number of cases I had the opportunity to interview Nye County residents whom I have long known and admired; these experiences were especially gratifying. I thank the residents throughout Nye County and Nevada—too numerous to mention by name—who provided assistance, information, and photographs. They helped make the successful completion of this project possible.

Appreciation goes to Chairman Joe S. Garcia, Jr., Robert N. “Bobby” Revert, and Patricia S. Mankins, the Nye County commissioners who initiated this project in 1987. Subsequently, Commissioners Richard L. Carver, Dave Hannigan, and Barbara J. Raper provided support. In this current round of interviews, Nye County Commissioners Andrew Borasky, Roberta “Midge” Carver, Joni Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Peter Liakopoulos provided unyielding support. Stephen T. Bradhurst, Jr., planning consultant for Nye County, gave unwavering support and advocacy of the program within Nye County in its first years. More recently, Darrell Lacy, Director, Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Project Office, gave his unwavering support. The United States Department of Energy, through Mr. Lacy’s office, provided funds for this round of interviews. Thanks are extended to Commissioner Eastley, Gary Hollis, and Mr. Lacy for their input regarding the conduct of this research and for serving as a sounding board when methodological problems were worked out. These interviews would never have become a reality without the enthusiastic support of the Nye County commissioners and Mr. Lacy.

Jean Charney served as editor and administrative assistant throughout the project; her services have been indispensable. Kimberley Dickey provided considerable assistance in transcribing many of the oral histories; Jean Charney, Julie Lancaster, and Darlene Morse also transcribed a number of interviews. Proofreading, editing, and indexing were provided at various times by Marilyn Anderson, Joni Eastley, Julie Lancaster, Teri Jurgens Lefever, and Darlene Morse. Joni Eastley proofed all the manuscripts and often double-checked, as best as possible, the spelling of people's names and the names of their children and other relatives. Jeanne Sharp Howerton provided digital services and consultation. Long-time Pahrump resident Harry Ford, founder and director of the Pahrump Valley Museum, served as a consultant throughout the project; his participation was essential. Much deserved thanks are extended to all these persons.

All material for the NCTHP was prepared with the support of the Nye County Nuclear Waste Repository Office, funded by the U.S. Department of Energy. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author and the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect the views of Nye County or the U.S. DOE.

—Robert D. McCracken  
2009



Historians generally consider the year 1890 as the close of the American frontier. By then, most of the western United States had been settled, ranches and farms developed, communities established, and roads and railroads constructed. The mining boomtowns, based on the lure of overnight riches from newly developed lodes, were but a memory.

Although Nevada was granted statehood in 1864, examination of any map of the state from the late 1800s shows that while most of the state was mapped and its geographical features named, a vast region—stretching from Belmont south to the Las Vegas meadows, comprising most of Nye County—remained largely unsettled and unmapped. In 1890, most of southcentral Nevada remained very much a frontier, and it continued to be so for at least another twenty years.

The spectacular mining booms at Tonopah (1900), Goldfield (1902), Rhyolite (1904), Manhattan (1905), and Round Mountain (1906) represent the last major flowering of what might be called the Old West in the United States. Consequently, southcentral Nevada, notably Nye County, remains close to the American frontier; closer, perhaps, than any other region of the American West. In a real sense, a significant part of the frontier can still be found in southcentral Nevada. It exists in the attitudes, values, lifestyles, and memories of area residents. The frontier-like character of the area also is visible in the relatively undisturbed quality of the natural environment, much of it essentially untouched by humans.

A survey of written sources on southcentral Nevada's history reveals some material from the boomtown period from 1900 to about 1915, but very little on the area after around 1920. The volume of available sources varies from town to town: A fair amount of literature, for instance, can be found covering Tonopah's first two decades of existence, and the town has had a newspaper continuously since its first year. In contrast, relatively little is known

about the early days of Gabbs, Round Mountain, Manhattan, Beatty, Amargosa Valley, and Pahrump. Gabbs's only newspaper was published intermittently between 1974 and 1976. Round Mountain's only newspaper, the *Round Mountain Nugget*, was published between 1906 and 1910. Manhattan had newspaper coverage for most of the years between 1906 and 1922. The *Rhyolite Herald*, longest surviving of Rhyolite/Bullfrog's three newspapers, lasted from 1905 to 1912. The *Beatty Bullfrog Miner* was in business from 1905 to 1906. Amargosa Valley has never had a newspaper. Pahrump's first newspaper did not appear until 1971. All these communities received only spotty coverage in the newspapers of other communities once their own newspapers folded, although Beatty was served by the *Beatty Bulletin*, published as part of the *Goldfield News* between 1947 and 1956. Consequently, most information on the history of southcentral Nevada after 1920 resides in the memories of individuals who are still living.

Aware of Nye County's close ties to our nation's frontier past, and recognizing that few written sources on local history are available, especially after about 1920, the Nye County Commissioners initiated the Nye County Town History Project (NCTHP) in 1987. The NCTHP represents an effort to systematically collect and preserve information on the history of Nye County. The centerpiece of the NCTHP is a large set of interviews conducted with individuals who had knowledge of local history. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and then edited lightly to preserve the language and speech patterns of those interviewed. All oral history interviews have been printed on acid-free paper and bound and archived in Nye County libraries, Special Collections in the Lied Library at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and at other archival sites located throughout Nevada. The interviews vary in length and detail, but together they form a never-before-available composite picture of each community's life and development. The collection of interviews for each community

can be compared to a bouquet: Each flower in the bouquet is unique—some are large, others are small—yet each adds to the total image. In sum, the interviews provide a composite view of community and county history, revealing the flow of life and events for a part of Nevada that has heretofore been largely neglected by historians.

Collection of the oral histories has been accompanied by the assembling of a set of photographs depicting each community's history. These pictures have been obtained from participants in the oral history interviews and other present and past Nye County residents. In all, more than 700 photos have been collected and carefully identified. Complete sets of the photographs have been archived along with the oral histories.

On the basis of the oral histories as well as existing written sources, histories have been prepared for the major communities in Nye County. These histories have also been archived.

The town history project is one component of a Nye County program to determine the socioeconomic impact of a federal proposal to build and operate a nuclear waste repository in southcentral Nye County. The repository, which would be located inside a mountain (Yucca Mountain), would be the nation's first, and possibly only, permanent disposal site for high-level radioactive waste. The Nye County Board of County Commissioners initiated the NCTHP in 1987 in order to collect information on the origin, history, traditions and quality of life of Nye County communities that may be impacted by the repository. If the repository is constructed, it will remain a source of interest for a long time and future generations will likely want to know more about the people who once resided at the site. And in the event that government policy changes and a high-level nuclear waste repository is not constructed in Nye County, material compiled by the NCTHP will remain for the use and enjoyment of all.

—R.D.M.

Interview with Al and Marilyn Bells and Robert McCracken November 11, 2008, at the Bells' home in Pahrump, Nevada.

## CHAPTER ONE

RM: Al, why don't you give me your name as it reads on your birth certificate?

AB: Alvin Louis Bells.

RM: And when and where were you born?

AB: Pasadena, California, 4/14/28.

RM: And what was your father's name?

AB: George Alan Bells.

RM: And do you know when and where he was born?

AB: In New Brighton, Pennsylvania. He was born July 3, 1886.

RM: And what was your mother's maiden name?

AB: Fawnie May Harris. It's F-a-w-n-i-e, just like the deer. She was raised over in Randsburg. My grandfather had a boardinghouse over there, but it was really a whorehouse. My mother used to take care of and clean up Death Valley Scotty's room for 25 cents a day when he stayed there.

RM: How interesting. And what was her birth date?

AB: March 14, 1894.

RM: Was she born in Randsburg?

AB: No, she was born in Vancouver, BC.

RM: And what did your father do for a living?

AB: He designed and built all the early front-end equipment—wheel alignment—and held the patents on most of it.

RM: Was he doing that out of Pasadena? What was his company called?

AB: Bells and Vaughn.

RM: And he developed front-end mechanisms for cars?

AB: Right. Radius plates and Stauff gauges and so forth.

RM: Marilyn, tell me your name as it reads on your birth certificate.

MB: Marilyn May Meidell.

RM: And when and where were you born?

MB: I was born in Omaha, Nebraska May 27, 1930.

RM: And what was your father's name?

MB: Charles Oscar Meidell. He was born in Athens, Illinois, in 1894, in December. He was a Sagittarius. I can't remember his birthday.

RM: And what was your mother's full name?

MB: Maude Cook Munroe.

RM: Do you know when and where she was born?

MB: In Omaha, I believe, in 1900.

RM: And what did your father do for a living?

MB: He was a cattle rancher in Nebraska, in the Sandhills.

RM: And where did you grow up. Al?

AB: In Pasadena.

RM: That was paradise back then. wasn't it?

AB: It was beautiful.

RM: There wasn't any smog, was there?

AB: No, that started to come in about 1939.

RM: Was your family pretty prosperous?

AB: We grew up during the Depression; nobody was prosperous. Six of us lived on a

dollar a day when you could get it. And this looks exactly like the world when I grew up, what's happening now. Banks are bad—the only thing is they're not closing the banks up like they did back in the Depression because of the government bailing the banks out. Otherwise, it would be identical.

RM: Talk a little bit about growing up in Pasadena. Like I say, to me it seemed like it must have been paradise back then.

AB: Well, nothing was a paradise back during the Depression.

RM: I mean the environment—the clean air, the warmth. . . .

AB: Yes, it was nice. We had the Vista del Arroyo Hotel and we had the big bridge that everybody jumped off of and committed suicide, the Colorado Street bridge. They're still jumping off that bridge and committing suicide. We were out on a Sunday drive back in the early '30s and some guy jumped off the bridge right in front of us.

RM: Pasadena was a separate city then, wasn't it? It wasn't connected like it is now to L.A.

AB: Pasadena hasn't grown very much. That's because there's no room to really grow.

MB: You had trolley cars that ran into Los Angeles.

AB: Yes, you had those trolley cars; you could go any place for 25 cents, and a nickel transfer. We need those again. We had the Red Car, the PG&E, in Pasadena. We had the short line and the Elk Knoll went down through the middle of Pasadena. They had little yellow cars. They went out to the end of Pasadena, then they had a turn-around. They turned the trolleys around and went back down Colorado Street, where they had the Rose Parade.

RM: Did they have the Rose Parade in those days?

AB: Oh absolutely; way back in the 1800s.

RM: And where did you grow up, Lynn?

MB: On a ranch between Mullen and Seneca, Nebraska. We came out to California when I was about 10 years old.

RM: Where did you move to?

MB: To Pasadena, and I met him—we've known each other since we were 10 and 11 years old.

RM: Did you go to school together?

MB: Yes, we went to Webster School in Pasadena and Marshall Junior High and Pasadena City College.

RM: When did you get married?

MB: It was during the Korean War.

AB: Tomorrow, November 12, it will be 58 years ago. I was in the navy; I was home on a 72-hour pass.

RM: When did you go into the service?

AB: The first time was in the '40s and I stayed in the reserves all through the '40s and then I went back in the navy for four years in 1950.

RM: Did they draft you for the Korean War?

AB: Yes. I was in the air force reserves and I didn't like the air force so I joined the navy. I got in trouble.

RM: Did you? How?

AB: Well, they stopped her allotment and gave me \$5 a month and I had to get a navy lawyer to fight for me. I was in Korea when the FBI came to my mother's house hunting for me. Scared the hell out of my mother.

MB: She thought he'd deserted or some miserable thing.

RM: When did you get out of the service?

AB: In '54.

RM: What did you do then?

AB: That was when I took over my dad's business in Pasadena.

RM: Did you stay with that for a few years?

AB: Not very long; I hated it.

MB: It was 30 years! What are you talking about?

RM: So when did you leave?

MB: He fired himself.

AB: I fired myself and I came up here.

MB: He came up here to live. He said, "I've had enough."

RM: What was it about it that finally got you?

AB: People. I was drinking four or five gallons of coffee a day and I'd come home and have to have a bunch of drinks to calm down, unwind.

RM: Just the tension of the people. What did you do, sell the business out in the end?

AB: I just walked away from it and gave it to my sister.

RM: Is it still there?

AB: She sold it and she's dead now, but it is still there. I have a picture of it up in my office.

RM: When did you first hear of Pahrump Valley?

AB: I'll explain that. Through my business in Pasadena I met two old prospectors by the name of Lou Coffin and Ben Burnham. They had an old pickup truck and they brought it into my business in Pasadena because they couldn't get it fixed and I fixed it for them. We were talking and I was telling them about my father-in-law Charlie, an old cowboy, who was having a problem in Pasadena because of his drinking problem. He was all by himself.



MB: My mother had died.

AB: I said we were looking for a place for him and they said, "We've got a little place up in Pahrump, Nevada," which we'd never heard of. So we rented a little trailer behind a pickup truck and came up here and parked down by that old well. Then we bought the place from them.

RM: How much land did they own?

AB: It was 128 acres.

MB: They sold it to Ernest Pechstein and he'd overextended himself and they got it back and said they didn't want to sell to any relatives that they knew. So we bought it for \$35 an acre.

RM: When was that?

AB: In 1957.

RM: What was Pechstein's story?

AB: He was a farmer. He lived at the corner of Mesquite and the highway, had that farm out there. He paid Coffin and Burnham \$75 an acre for this and paid them down to the point where there was \$35 left so we got it for \$35 dollars an acre.

RM: So you took over his contract. Did you add to those 128 acres over the years?

AB: Oh, yes. Altogether it's about 1700 acres.

RM: Did you add it early on or just gradually?

AB: Just gradually. We started buying in 1965. We bought 1,040 acres right next to the ranch here from Lester Hay Shurtleff and later on we bought 360 acres from Willis Garland over on the highway. In the meantime, we took in a partner because we couldn't afford it all. We took in a doctor from Arcadia, California, who was a friend of ours, named Herbert L. Herscher.

RM: Did Burnham and Coffin show up in your life again?

AB: Yes, they came up here. We put them to work farming with her father because they didn't have any Social Security. We paid them a little bit and board and room and so forth so they could get some Social Security. They were here three or four years or five years, something like that.

RM: They had not worked in a paying job where they would have deducted for Social Security?

AB: They were miners.

RM: And what finally happened to them?

MB: They went to Wickenburg, Arizona, and that's the last time we were in touch with them. They're probably dead now.

RM: Who did you get the 1,000 acres from?

AB: Lester Hay Shurtleff.

RM: And what was Lester Shurtleff's story?

AB: He had a lot of land. They've got a Lester Road up in Overton and they've got a Shurtleff Road up here.

RM: Was he LDS?

AB: Oh, absolutely. This whole valley was LDS when we came in here.

RM: There were a few that weren't: I don't think the Fords were.

AB: I don't know what Stan was, but the Bowmans, Blossers, and all the rest of them were Mormon.

RM: When did they start farming down at this northwest end of the valley?

AB: We're the only ones that started farming here back in '57. Ted Blosser was over on the highway and Shirley Shirley was up there farther—they were farming over there before

we were.

RM: I talked to Ted Blosser years ago; where was the Shirley Shirley place?

AB: Calvada bought all that property up there. They've got a trailer park there now—what is that?

MB: It's up where the old Dollar Ranch used to be, isn't it?

AB: Yes, right on Highway 160.

RM: At the north end of the valley. You showed me a picture of the first house you lived in when you got here. Tell me about that—it's a cabin really, isn't it?

AB: That was 40 years old, I think, when we came up here.

MB: It had an old wooden stove in it, a small one.

AB: We've still got that little wood stove here.

RM: Describe what it consisted of.

AB: Rats. [Laughter] You'd go to bed at night and rats would be up there. I'd shoot a hole in the ceiling with a 12-gauge shotgun and the dust would come down, but at least we could go to sleep.

There were a lot of wild horses around here then. One night I went out to take a leak. I went out in front of that little shack right there and I peed on a horse, a stallion. It was lying there and I couldn't see, it was so dark. He reared up in front of me. I had finger marks on my whatchamacallit for a week. [Laughter] It scared the hell out of me.

RM: That's a great story. Was the cabin one room or two rooms or what?

AB: It was just one room.

MB: And a wooden floor with a stove, and that was it.

AB: We had grain sacks ~~that we~~ slept on top of.

MB: And you had to pump your own water, which was outside at the well.

RM: Who dug the well originally?

AB: Coffin and Burnham did; they used the casing out of a hot water heater.

RM: How deep was it?

MB: 28 feet deep.

AB: It was 13 feet to water then.

MB: In some places it was only nine.

RM: And how deep is the water table now?

AB: It's about 45 feet.

RM: So it's dropped a little but it's still relatively close.

AB: Yes, we have a well out there pumping a 1,000 gallons a minute and the bowls only sit at 150 feet. We're pumping a lot of water out of that, 1,000 gallons a minute.

RM: What was it like living in this cabin?

AB: Crowded.

RM: Did you have children by then?

AB: We sure as hell didn't make any in there. [Laughter]

MB: We had Cindy and as the years progressed then we had Stephanie and then Craig was the youngest.

AB: See this room here? We built that in 1959 and that was where we lived after that shack.

RM: What went through your mind when you thought, "I'm getting out of Pasadena and we're moving to Pahrump?"

AB: That wasn't the idea ~~when~~ we come up here. It was some place to get away from Pasadena on a weekend or ~~something~~ like that.

RM: And also for your ~~father~~?

MB: Yes, to put him back on the ranch, on the land, again.

AB: We bought him a horse. He'd get his check from the government and ride the horse down to the bar and get tanked and get on the horse and he'd go to sleep in the saddle and the horse would bring him home.

MB: He used to cash his Social Security check down here at old Fred's bar that is just a relic now.

RM: Where was Fred's bar?

AB: Bragg Street south on 372 as you go out of town and over the hill to Shoshone.

RM: So you weren't thinking of moving here when you first bought the place. What went through your mind to make you change it?

AB: Like I told you, too many people. And she brought the kids up here about '59, didn't you?

MB: Well, we used to come up here and spend the summer. The kids would have a blast; they loved it.

AB: I was farming here and the father-in-law and Coffin and Burnham and Lynn would irrigate while I was down in Pasadena. I'd spend three days down there sometimes and four days here and vice versa. I'd fly back and forth from Pomona.

RM: Did you know how to fly before you started that?

AB: I learned how to fly back in the '40s.

RM: Were you a navy pilot?

AB: No, but I bought a surplus army airplane right after the war, a BT-13.

RM: Did you start flying up here immediately after '57 or was it a few years later?

AB: It was a few years, not too long. 1960 wouldn't you say, Lynn?

MB: I would say it was in the '60s.

RM: Where did you land at first?

AB: Right out here—I had two dirt airstrips on the property out here.

RM: Did you just take a grader and make them?

AB: Yes, I had a Cat and a drag.

RM: Tell me about flying back and forth to Pasadena. What route do you take?

AB: Right straight across that mountain out there, the Kingstons. I used to take out of here and go to those Kingstons because it's sharp. I'd get up there and it's like that—you can feel it coming. It's a very dangerous place and they're getting ready to build an airport down there by that dry lake. You can't come in there. A lot of times I'd come in the summer and I'd have to drop my gear and my flaps and sink down through there, it was so bad. And they're going to build an airport down there.

RM: The uplift was so bad?

AB: Yes. They're building an airport in the worst place in the valley. You can't tell them; it's like I don't know anything, I only did it for 15 years.

RM: So you just fly straight over the Kingstons and you're in Pasadena.

AB: Yes, go right alongside the Bicycle Range area there at Barstow, the gunnery range. I'd go to Pomona, to Brackett Field.

RM: And what range did you go over to get into the L.A. Basin? The San Bernardino Mountains? How long did it take you to get there, takeoff to landing?

AB: A little over an hour.

MB: About an hour and a half, wasn't it?

AB: An hour and 20 minutes, maximum. But to drive it used to take us almost five hours.

MB: Six hours. It'd take us an hour from Shoshone to Pahrump because it was just nothing but a wash. It was gravel and it would take us an hour because that road was so bad.

RM: What route did you take when you drove to L.A.?

AB: We'd go to Shoshone, take 128 down to Baker and then 15 into L.A., Pasadena.

RM: That was before the interstate—it was a two-lane highway, wasn't it?

AB: It was a two-lane highway.

MB: Over Cajon Pass. The new road wasn't built then and you had to wind around all the way to San Bernardino.

AB: I took Highland over to Citrus and Ontario to Upland and went down to Foothill and up Foothill Boulevard.

RM: So you would spend three days in Pasadena with your business and four days up here farming.

AB: And vice versa. And we put our well in out here, I was building houses; I built all these houses and Lynn did the painting.

MB: There was some hired help here and there.

RM: Who would you hire as help?

AB: Oh, just kids. We never hired any professional help, did we? School kids helped. And I used to hire them to chop cotton for us; we grew cotton.

AB: When we were raising cotton on 320 acres, she would take the kids that were out of school in the summer and work with them all day long in that heat while they chopped weeds out the cotton.

RM: Speaking of heat, how did you deal with it? Neither one of you had lived where they had this kind of heat.

AB: A lot of times it was 120-some degrees here.

MB: We were young. [Laughter]

AB: I was laying all of these blocks for houses out there in that heat. It didn't bother any

of us.

MB: It was a dry heat; if you get into the humidity, that's something else.

AB: She's got a picture of our kid Craig on sawhorses in a dresser drawer with a window screen over it to keep the flies off him when we were building this place out here.

RM: That's cute. What was the first crop that you put in here?

AB: Grass—NK37.

RM: This was in the field?

AB: It was just the field. We didn't put anything around these houses until later.

RM: How were you irrigating it?

AB: From a well.

RM: So you put in grass for feed—not oats, but grass.

AB: No, just grass. NK37; it's a hybrid Bermuda. We had to put something in this ground because it's hard ground and you have a hell of a time raising anything the first year. I've got spots in that field where we've been farming for 50 years that still won't grow anything.

RM: Why?

AB: It's dead ground.

MB: I guess it's just sterile. We keep putting mulch and stuff there and it still comes out.

AB: There are spots as big as this room or this house in some places.

RM: How did you know to put in grass first?

AB: Oh, everybody knows how to do that. That's a given.

RM: How long did you grow grass?

AB: Quite a few years. I'm still growing it out there now.

RM: But when did you put in what you'd call a cash crop?

AB: Alfalfa. And we had corn in here, field corn.



RM: Was that your first field crop?

AB: I think that was the first crop. We leased this place out to a guy and he put that field corn in.

RM: Why did you lease it out?

AB: I couldn't afford it. I had to go to work for the cotton gin for three dollars an hour to feed us.

RM: Oh really? You mean you couldn't make a living on the farm? Did the other people make livings on their farms?

AB: Yes, but they had a lot more land than we did. They all had around 300 acres, or something like that; you can't make a living on 80 acres, which is about what we were farming. These trees take up a lot of it.

MB: On the other land we bought from Shurtleff they raised our taxes 1300 percent compared to what they were. We were going to give that to the kids so they more or less forced us to subdivide. That's how we formed a corporation called Bell Vista and that's what it became—Bell Vista Subdivision.

RM: And hence the name of the road, Bell Vista. Why don't you talk about how you came up with that name?

AB: It's the name of the corporation. We didn't name any of the roads after us—I never wanted a road named Alvin. But a guy up here—an asshole, excuse the expression—knew that I didn't want a road named Alvin so he named one Alvin right up the street. [Laughter]

MB: And it's still there. For the name, we wanted to get our name, Bell, in there somewhere and Vista is the view, you know. Tim Hafen and Larry Bolling came out one night and we looked at all of the subdivision maps and I said, "Let's name this [road] Bell Vista." At the time, I didn't know it was a section line.

AB: It was named Savcoy at the time.

MB: So we built the road—Larry Bolling graveled and did all the work on the roads and we paid him \$1,000 a month or something like that. Bob Ruud came out one day and he said, “God, that goes right up into the hills.”

AB: They were going to use Mesquite.

MB: And go across and up. That’s how the road to Amargosa development got started—it came right off of Bell Vista and went right over to Death Valley Junction.

RM: And your land went clear to Bell Vista?

AB: Clear to the mountains, almost. Clear to Simkins Road.

RM: Do you still have that land?

MB: No, it’s all been sold.

AB: We subdivided and sold. We own three lots around the R-Bar and we own another property down the street on Bell Vista and then this.

MB: Yes, this is the original acreage that we bought.

AB: We added two and a half acres to it; that was all we added here.

RM: What was the first crop you put in after you started with the grass?

AB: Pasture grass—that was all we ever did. We had alfalfa in with it, it was a mix of grass and alfalfa, and I’d cut it and bale it and sell it.

RM: Does that grass get pretty high?

AB: Oh, yes.

RM: And it’s good feed isn’t it?

AB: Oh, excellent feed.

RM: Is it better than alfalfa?

AB: It’s almost as good a protein as alfalfa.

## CHAPTER TWO

RM: Lynn, what was it like for a woman coming up from Pasadena to really a completely different lifestyle?

MB: Well, I was raised on a ranch in Nebraska; I loved the land and I loved the country. I was having a blast, along with the kids [Laughs]. I loved it.

RM: Okay, you are showing me a picture of your grass field here. And then you would cut that and bale it? How many bales would you get from an acre per year?

AB: That grass would do about 10 ton an acre.

RM: And that's a lot, right? How many tons a year does it take to support a cow?

AB: It takes four tons for a horse and six tons for a cow.

RM: So basically you were doing over a cow an acre from your grass. Did you pasture the cows on the grass after you cut it?

AB: No, I didn't want any of the cows on it because they follow each other through the field—they make trails through the field and you can't water it.

RM: Did you have cows?

MB: Yes, we had 22 head here at one time.

RM: Are they beef or milk?

AB: They were bulls.

MB: They were duke's mixture.

RM: Were they quality breeding bulls?

MB: We had one beautiful bull.

AB: Those were Durham Bulls. morning Durham Bulls; beautiful bulls.

RM: How did you get into ~~that~~?

AB: Do you know Bob Owens? Well, Bob Owens never had any money so we would trade him hay for livestock. We got all kinds of livestock from him—pigs, sheep, and everything else.

RM: And this was after you had sold out down in Pasadena?

AB: Yes. We did a lot of barter back in those days around here.

RM: Can you talk some more about that?

AB: Well, Bob Owens, for example, and Etha Connelly, that was the daughter, didn't have any money but they had animals. So we would raise the hay, give them the hay, and they would give us pork and . . . what else?

MB: I don't know. Stephanie got her first Morgan horse from Bob Owens.

AB: We traded horses and sheep and cattle and everything else from the hay we raised for them.

RM: And would you butcher the stock or would you sell it?

AB: We'd have it butchered at Ron Peterson's. He had a place down on 372.

MB: They'd come out and shoot one of the cows and take them down to him.

MB: I don't think it belonged to Ron Peterson at the time; it was Ed Siri's at one time.

AB: Oh, I guess it was Ed Siri. One day they shot a cow and put it on my herald [sp] bed out there on the back—he'd sit that bed up and roll that cow on it and pull it back this way. So I am going down to Ron Peterson with it and the head's hanging over the side and I stopped at a stop sign down there by two gals in a car; they're looking there. I took my hat off, put it over my heart, and drove off. [Laughter]

MB: Ed Siri was the sheriff at the time, too.

AB: He never carried a gun, he just carried a sap. If anybody get out of line he'd knock them in the head with that sap.

RM: Is that right? He lived in Tonopah. didn't he? Or did he live here?

AB: No, he lived here; then he went to Fallon. One of his sons lived in Tonopah.

RM: After you put alfalfa with the grass. what was next in your sequence of crops?

AB: We leased it that one year to the guy who raised field corn. Then we took it back and went back to raising alfalfa.

RM: Can you get more beef production from alfalfa or from your grass?

AB: Well, it's a mixture. Straight alfalfa is not a good horse feed; you need some grass in it.

RM: Why?

AB: It's just too hot.

MB: It's hard on their kidneys.

AB: It'll abort a foal.

MB: And it makes them ornery and they'll buck you off.

AB: Grass calms them down.

MB: Al wanted to sell the place and I didn't. One day we decided, "We'll put our big house in Bradbury up for sale (in California) and this up for sale, and whatever goes first, that's what we'll do."

RM: What year was that?

AB: About '65.

MB: I didn't come up here full time until 1967. And I put the kids in school and by golly, they learned how to read.

AB: Ted Blosser's wife, Marie, was one of the schoolteachers.

MB: And Erma Thompson, who was the sister-in-law to Leon Hughes. Our son was in the third grade up here and she got ahold of him and taught him how to read and oh boy. . . .

AB: We had a bad time when we got a new principal in here named Brown. He wouldn't pick our kids up because Mesquite wasn't graveled; we finally graveled it. We wanted to bring gravel up here behind the mountain and gravel down to Leslie so the school bus could pick them up. But when I found out they wouldn't pick our kids up I spent a Sunday afternoon hunting for him. I finally found him and I went over and put my finger in his chest and I said, "You'd better pick my kids up or else." He called Ed Siri and told him that I was going to hurt him, you know what I mean? Which I did hurt him—I buried my finger in his chest. But anyway, they picked the kids up the next day.

MB: Oh boy, he just tore the valley apart. Some were for him, others just detested the man. And we came to find out he didn't really have the credentials to be a principal so he didn't last very long.

RM: And what year was this, roughly?

AB: I'd say about '69.

RM: When did you put in your first cotton crop here?

AB: In 1969.

MB: When did we buy that other acreage?

AB: We were in cashing the kid's paycheck at the Sahara when they landed on the moon—that was 1969. So we put it in about '65 or '66.

RM: What made you decide to do that? They were already growing cotton here, weren't they?

AB: Yes. We bought this ranch from Willis Garland and he had a cotton allotment so we planted the cotton on that allotment, 320 acres.

MB: It was a cash crop.

RM: And how did it work out for you?

AB: Good. I've got a deal up there that said we had the best turnout on our cotton of any rancher in the valley.

MB: The best long staple cotton. In fact, it won an award. That was when Bob Ruud leased the place.

RM: Why was it so good here?

AB: It was good all over the valley. We were making the best cotton in the world here in Pahrump Valley.

RM: And why was yours the best turnout of the valley?

AB: It just happened that way. Maybe next year another ranch will have a good turnout. And then we couldn't get any ginners. We had Johnny Bell working in the gin and I went to work in the cotton gin so I could gin our own cotton. I worked up there about seven seasons. Jacque Ruud was the gin manager, Johnny Bell was the ginner, and I was the assistant ginner.

RM: Was Johnny Bell any relation?

AB: No. We had a little problem with the Mexicans. That's where I learned how to speak Spanish because they were all *mojados*, wetbacks, working in there. (*Mojado* is "wet.") They always thought we were *hermanos*, brothers, so we just finally said, "Si, hermanos," and agreed with them. "Yeah, we're brothers;" but we weren't.

RM: And they did most of the cotton labor?

AB: We all did. I ran the press, and Johnny . . . we worked on the cotton gin. The only labor in that cotton gin was the guys working behind the press and working the cotton yard. There were only three Mexicans working up there.

RM: What was your yield?

AB: Two bales an acre.

RM: Is that considered good around the world?

AB: Yes.

RM: And what was a bale bringing in those days?

AB: I think it was getting around 60 cents a pound for a 500-pound bale.

RM: Did you make any money growing cotton?

AB: Yes, but the last year we lost money because on August 23 it froze.

RM: What year was that, do you remember?

AB: It was in the early '70s. And when cotton freezes, you can smell it for a mile. I went to work that morning and I thought, "Oh, shit." Because I could smell that smell. It's a very different smell. It's like running across a dead body—once you smell it, you'll always remember it. That cotton stinks when it gets wet.

RM: How did you know how to do all of this with no background in farming?

AB: I kept my mouth shut and watched. That's how I've learned everything I've ever done—kept my mouth shut and watched.

RM: And when did you stop growing cotton?

AB: When the gin closed.

MB: The price went down to 52 cents a pound or whatever it was so it would cost us more to grow cotton than we'd get back.

AB: We couldn't go on the world market anymore. The federal government said no so we couldn't sell it on a world market.

RM: Can you say what was the last year you grew cotton?

AB: I think '75.

RM: And it was because the gin closed?

AB: No. The gin closed because we stopped raising cotton. The federal government more



or less nationalized and told us what we could do and couldn't do and the price went way down. Cotton was the only thing that you could borrow any money on for a crop. You couldn't borrow any money for alfalfa or oats or anything else. If we wanted to farm here, we'd have to put cotton in because we'd go to Calcot and borrow money to raise the crops. And we'd raise the alfalfa alongside it with the money we got from them.

RM: By alongside it, you mean on another pasture, another plot of land?

AB: Yes.

RM: What did you do with that land when you quit cotton?

AB: We just did alfalfa. We leased it out one year to Frank Woner and he put in wheat.

MB: Oh, then we had lettuce. The lettuce was just marvelous.

AB: We leased it out for lettuce and Norton raised 320 acres on our land in lettuce. We took it to the cotton gin and had a deal up there where they put it on a humidifier and so forth in packages.

RM: And where were they selling it?

AB: All over the world.

MB: He was the Secretary of Agriculture.

AB: No, he wanted to be Secretary of Agriculture; his name was Norton. He wanted to get to be Secretary of Agriculture so he let all this property go to run for that office and he didn't get it. He never came back in here, but it raised some beautiful lettuce.

MB: Just gorgeous, big and beautiful.

AB: He walked away from our place over there, the whole 300 acres of lettuce. We'd bag it up and give it to everybody in the valley.

RM: What other crops were grown on that land after that?

AB: We subdivided it after that.

### CHAPTER THREE

RM: Talk about how you got into subdivision.

AB: I just didn't want to farm anymore. ~~There~~ was really no money in it, I didn't think. That's the reason most of the people here ~~went~~ out of farming. And I couldn't get any more water rights for all of this property, this 1.000 acres next to us. We got water rights for 66 acres up there and that was it and we applied for other water rights and they turned us down. We couldn't farm all of that land up there so the only thing we could do was subdivide it. We did six subdivisions. There is a picture up there from when we were tearing the mesquite trees out to build roads. A friend of ours painted that with watercolors.

RM: And what year did you begin to think about subdividing?

AB: In '72.

RM: Talk about the process you went through in your own mind and what you had to do legally to subdivide.

AB: Well, if you go down to my office I can show you all those maps on the walls where everybody had to sign it. It took us about a year to get all of the signatures on that with the health department and for the phone company and Valley Electric and so forth to service that. Then we had to find people to run the phone in. We had to pay for the ditches and so forth.

MB: You had to have your soil analyzed.

AB: Yes, you had to have your soil analyzed and it was a pain in the ass.

MB: And you went before the county commissioners, which was all up in Tonopah, and they would have to approve it.

AB: It took a year on each subdivision to get it approved.

RM: How could you afford to do all that for your first subdivision?

AB: We brought in the doctor I told you about, Herbert Hersher, in Arcadia. And we had another partner who never put any money into this corporation; he bought that partner out. Then we subdivided it with his help. We couldn't have done it by ourselves.

MB: And I used to call him up and diagnose the kids and Al would fly up with the medicine.

AB: He was like a father to us.

MB: Yes, he was really a great guy.

AB: He was a doctor on Boulder Dam.

MB: He didn't think Las Vegas would do anything so he didn't hang his shingle out. He went down to Arcadia.

RM: Oh, my gosh. So what was the name of your first subdivision?

AB: Bell Vista Unit 1.

RM: And how many lots was it?

AB: At first it was 160 acres in two-and-a-half acre lots.

RM: What were you selling them for?

AB: They were \$2,995—\$180 dollars down and \$30 bucks a month.

RM: What would a lot like that go for now?

AB: About \$50,000, if you could sell it.

RM: And did you have trouble selling them?

AB: Not then. I sold them all over the United States. I used to go down to Preferred Equity, Calvada, to the bar down there. They were trucking all those people out on their buses and I'd go down and sit amongst the people and bring them out here and sell property till Calvada finally found what was happening. Oh man, they really got mad.

RM: Were you undercutting Calvada?

AB: No, I was just selling a better product. a lot better product.

RM: In what sense was it better?

AB: Well, two-and-a-half acres. and they were just selling small little lots.

RM: How many of those lots have got houses on them now, do you think?

AB: Between houses and trailers. I'd say it's about half.

RM: And you didn't have any trouble with water rights when you did the lots, did you?

AB: I owned all of my water rights. When we were subdividing up here then, you didn't need water rights to subdivide; now you have to have water rights. But when we subdivided that 320 acres over there, we had to give the state 95.35 acre-feet of water, 100 acre-feet of water, which is worth \$15,000 an acre-foot. So there is a lot of money there.

RM: Yes, that's a lot. In what other ways did you make your sales? Did you work with local realtors?

AB: No, I did everything myself.

RM: How did you do it?

AB: I drank a lot. I'd sit around the bars and keep my mouth shut and I'd hear the people talking—a lot of people go to the bartender and ask about lots and things like that—and then I'd jump on them.

RM: And that really did work?

AB: It sure did. I sold 1,000 lots. I did no advertising. It was all in bars.

RM: All in bars through your own personal contact with these people.

AB: That's right. That's about all, wasn't it, Lynn?

MB: Yes, and then they would, on average, tell about five other people and maybe three other people out of the five would buy. They'd tell their friends.

AB: And I would tell the bartenders, "I am going to give 100 bucks if you shoot somebody

to me.”

MB: And that worked too. Here is the plane we used to fly, a nice Navion. And this is a picture of one of the first irrigation ditches we made. This is a picture of the trees—we lived down in here for a while.

RM: And Mount Charleston is in the background. Did you have to level the land when you came?

MB: Oh yes. We’ve got a great big plain out there and the land had a four-foot drop so it wouldn’t irrigate. We smoothed it all out.

RM: So you smoothed it out and then you had to dig ditches, didn’t you?

MB: Well, yes, we made our irrigation ditches and then you come off of that with your rows and let the water run down. The kids would have more fun in the water, in the ditches.

AB: They’d lose their pants and their shoes. Every once in a while I’ll dig some of them up.

RM: What was the most you ever farmed?

AB: About 500 acres—320 in this and the 66 up there.

RM: What did you do with your alfalfa?

AB: Sold it.

RM: Who did you sell it to?

AB: Everybody. Walk around here—you’ll see people with horses.

RM: Weren’t there a lot of other people growing alfalfa—wasn’t there competition for that?

AB: Yes, but they had a lot of animals in this valley.

MB: We had semi-trucks full of alfalfa and they’d take them down to California.

AB: Oh yes, I forgot that we sold to Mercury, to the Test Site.

RM: And why was that?

MB: They had animals up there with little windows carved in their bellies to test after the atomic bombs, and they'd feed the cattle.

RM: They were studying the effect of the radiation on the animals. So you were selling them alfalfa?

AB: Yes. Bill Mankins was hauling it.

RM: Were you selling a lot to Mercury?

AB: Yes, it was 26 ton at a time. I sold quite a bit.

MB: And Tom Duke down here had the tack store and feed. He would buy a lot of alfalfa and sell it to different people.

RM: What were you getting for your alfalfa?

AB: Back in those days about \$120 a ton, something like that.

RM: Just for comparison's sake, what would it be now?

AB: Let's see—what does Stephanie pay?

MB: It's \$18 dollars a bale.

AB: Yes, we were selling them for \$5 or \$6 dollars a bale then. Now our daughter's paying \$18 dollars a bale. We have a house up at Truckee; we've got an acre and a quarter almost in town there and she has her own horse and is paying \$18 dollars a bale for hay.

RM: You don't have hay here now, do you?

AB: No. And you can't get into California with Nevada hay; you have to have it certified and all that. We have trouble even taking some mesquite wood up there. We took some mesquite wood to Pasadena one time. My sister had a house next to my mother's house, and the neighbor next door, the old man, came over. I don't know who he was talking to, but he said, "I've got the funniest bug killing all of my fruit trees." Have you ever seen these borers,

these bugs in this mesquite wood? No? Well anyway, he came over and said, "Something is happening to my trees; they're all dying ~~something~~ has gotten into them." It was these mesquite beetles here. I took that wood down to Pasadena and it got into his trees and killed them. I never did tell him, but I figured that out. That's why you can't haul it into California.

RM: And that's why they check you at that agricultural station out of Barstow; interesting. Talk about your experiences with the testing on the Test Site.

AB: It was a boon for everybody around here because that was the only place they could go to work. All the men in our family went up there and went to work.

RM: Did you work there?

AB: No, I didn't; our son and our son-in law did and that gave them some money. It was the only place they could get a job. The cotton gin went down.

RM: Was this after they went underground with the testing or when it was still in the air?

AB: Both. They're still working up there. When you come into town you see a parking spot there on 160 with all those cars? That's all Test Site workers. They've never stopped working up there, no matter what they say. Our new President Obama is going to stop that because of your congressman.

RM: And it looks like they're really going to try to put an end to Yucca Mountain.

AB: That's what I am talking about. That's the Test Site.

RM: And that's the big opportunity for this part of the country.

AB: Oh yes, all of our PETT (payment equal to taxes) money. We get millions of dollars a year from PETT to run this county. If we lose that what are we going to do, when we're in trouble already?

MB: And how can they incorporate when our taxes would go up?

RM: Yes, your taxes would go even higher.

AB: Yes, they incorporated Truckee. After they incorporated, they didn't have enough money to clean the snow off the roads so they ran an assessment on the property owners up there. And that's a big county, it's damn near as big as this. It's a Nevada county that goes clear down past Auburn.

RM: How did you experience the nuclear testing that they did in the atmosphere?

AB: It didn't bother us, it all went to Utah. When they did that it would be like daylight for about two or three minutes.

RM: They did it right at dawn, didn't they?

AB: Yes, just before dawn.

MB: It was an eerie white light and then the rumble would come.

AB: It sounds like a hungry stomach.

MB: My father could never describe that rumble. He says once you hear it, it stays with you. And the house would go phew, phom.

RM: It would lift off but then drop?

AB: And it cracked a lot of our windows. That was in the other house, before we built this.

RM: Did your dad ever see a mushroom cloud?

AB: No. It's too far away.

[The cat, Stubby, is watching the interview.]

AB: I'll tell you the story about this cat. We used to have a lot of bobcats; we have a lot of coyotes under these trees there right now. But we had a cat that got out and got bred with a bobcat, a good-sized one, and that's how these cats got started.

RM: You mean, this cat is part bobcat?

AB: Yes, that's its heritage. She just lost one of her cats, called Tigger.

MB: Tigger, oh I loved him so.



RM: Did she lose him to the coyotes?

MB: No, he died.

AB: The coyotes got one of our daughter's cats.

MB: And one got our little Chihuahua the other day. It came right up in the yard and old Pinky must have thought she was a Great Dane and she gets out there and barks and he picked her up.

AB: She was the same size as the cat.

RM: That's too bad. Talk about some of the people in the valley. You mentioned the Simkins.

AB: I knew all the Simkins. Paul Simkins was a good friend of ours. He owned the ranch right next door, over at Simkins and Blagg. That'd be northeast a little bit. And Zula Simkins was the sister.

RM: Was there another Simkin brother?

AB: There were two brothers. Zula's son Terry and what's that other kid's name?

MB: Well, we always call him Fig.

AB: No, Terry is Fig. Anyway there were two of them; Zula had two sons.

## CHAPTER FOUR

AB: One day I had the baler; I was baling hay over there. It's a diesel baler and old Fig came over with a siphon hose and siphoned fuel out of it, put it in his car and he got about 100 yards down the highway because it was diesel. [Laughter]

There was a lot of stealing among these ranchers. You'd go out to the field and a piece of equipment would be gone and you'd go down to somebody else's field and there it is.

RM: Just borrowing it, then?

AB: Yes, they'd just come in and get it—we were all really close. Bob Ruud and we and Blosser were all living up here. If it hadn't been for Blosser we'd have never got started farming.

RM: How did that happen?

AB: We just met him and borrowed his equipment until we could afford our own.

RM: And he let you borrow it and didn't charge you?

MB: We'd take it and Al would work on it and weld it all up and bring it back better than it had been.

AB: He got real sick and I went over to run his ranch for a couple of years. What was it he had?

MB: Some sort of seizures.

AB: Right. I taught him how to fly. He and his wife would fly with us. We'd go down and rent a fairly new Bonanza or something like that, fly down to Brawley. Talford Winn [sp] was leasing all of our ranches up here at that time and he was in Brawley so we'd lease a plane and fly down to Brawley.

AB: Talk about when I rented that airplane I'd never flown before.

MB: We rented a Bonanza, the V-tail. They are not too stable in the air compared to a Navion. So we got in the darned thing and Maria Blosser, Ted's wife, and I were sitting in the back. I always say my prayers before we take off and when we land. Marie was looking at me and she said, "What are you doing?"

MB: And I said, "I always say my prayers before we take off." And I could tell . . . Al was going through the dash.

AB: I was trying to figure out how to fly it.

MB: It took him about 20 minutes after we got in the air to figure out where everything was. [Laughter] She didn't know anything.

AB: I've flown a lot of different airplanes.

MB: I should tell you this next story because Al will leave things out. When we had our houses in Bradbury and here up for sale, Al found an old guy named Fred who was a good ranch salesman—he sold in Wyoming and Colorado and New Mexico and all through there. He came into Al's business in California one day and they got to talking and Al said, "I've got this property out in Pahrump I want to sell."

So Fred said, "Okay, let's go see it." Al was out partying the night before and Fred came up to the house, banged on the door, and it was just getting light; this was in California.

AB: I had a hangover you'd have been proud of.

MB: He said, "Wait a minute, I've got to get two aspirins and then we can go." So he did and they went out to Brackett in Pomona. Al checks out the plane and Fred disappears to the can and he's gone and he's gone and he's gone and Al washes the plane and goes out in the tulies and does his thing and Fred finally comes back and Al says, "Where in the hell have you been?"

He said, “Well, I got two steps to the john and shit in my pants. I’ve been in there trying to clean myself up.” [Laughter]

So Al said, “This is the first time I ever took off in a plane with a cigarette in my mouth to kill the stench.” They landed here in Pahrump and the airport was a graveled airport right across from the cotton gin where Smith’s Food King is now.

AB: Let me take it from there. Crawford Markets—have you ever heard of them?

RM: Yes.

AB: Well, old man Crawford wanted to buy a ranch like this for his wife and raise vegetables on it. So we landed on the corner of 372 and 160, which was the old airstrip, and went to meet him. Crawford had a brand spanking new Oldsmobile 98 with silk brocade upholstery and the whole nine yards. So he said, “You drive; you know where you’re going.”

Mesquite was a gravel road then and it came down about where Leslie is and jogged this way. You couldn’t see around that corner until you got around it. So I’m driving down Leslie, and all of a sudden I get to that jog and it’s a sea of water—Ted Blosser’s tail water had run loose. So I went like this real quick to get onto the dry ground and Crawford grabbed the door handle to hang onto it and away he went out in the water. So here he is lying upside down in the water like that and I am saying to myself, “I lost that sale.” I got him back in there and what a mess.

MB: And then Al and Fred flew back to California and Fred came into the office the next morning. He lived with his daughter and she took one look at him with mud on his boots and he stunk and she said, “Where in the world have you been?”

And he said, “Pahrump.”

AB: She called me on the phone and ate my ass out for doing that to her father. He was an old man then; he was about my age now.

MB: No, he was about 70 then, I think. God, I laughed so hard when Al told me that story I couldn't believe it.

RM: Oh my God, that's funny. Tell me some more stories; I love these stories.

AB: Sometimes we'd be here drinking and I'd get too drunk to drive and I'd have to fly to the bar. I'd land in front of the bar on the street. We used to land every place here. When they got power they called me and said, "Hey Al, they got power lines in here now."

MB: For godsakes, watch out for them. Old Talford Winn flew in one day. He had a Bonanza and he clipped the power lines and thank God it had a V shape because it didn't stick and he got through. But oh boy, he came to attention.

RM: Did you ever have any experiences with Roland Wiley? I know he flew, too.

AB: I only met him once. I flew down to that airstrip years ago with the guy that owned the Pahrump Ranch, Walt Williams, and his attorney, Talford Winn. He had this place leased for a while. I flew down there and talked to Roland Wiley. He was a nice old man. Too bad what they did to his canyon.

RM: Oh, it's awful; Cathedral Canyon is trashed. There are no buildings left there.

AB: What about the Christ?

RM: I am not sure; I think it's badly damaged at best. But none of Roland's buildings or houses or anything are there.

MB: One time, Al read this book, *1001 Things for Free* and it said you could get a couple of buffalo. And we went up to Boise?

AB: No, my dad and brother went in a pick-up truck. We went up to Boise, Montana, and got two buffalos and brought them down here and turned them out and they took off. Stan Ford's wife, Addie, was standing in the kitchen doing the dishes and one of the buffalo was out there in the back and she said, "Stan, there is a buffalo in our yard."

He said, “What the hell have you been drinking?” Sure enough, there it was.

[Laughter]

And that other buffalo I chased clear up the mountain; I chased it for a long time. I finally got it back down here and we tied a big rope around its neck.

MB: We named her Susie, it was a female.

AB: Yes, Susie. We had her down by the hothouse in a pen for a long time. Larry Bolling picked her up and took her down to his ranch.

MB: She mated with that Holstein bull we had and she had a calf.

AB: And they go muley, but this one didn't. They had a Hereford, wasn't it? We called it a Herfallo.

MB: If you'd walk out in the field with a can of beer in your hand, you'd better put it down and run because that bull would come over and drink it all down.

AB: He'd knock me on my ass. That thing weighed a ton.

RM: They're mean, too.

AB: He wasn't mean, he just wanted to drink a beer. He'd throw me on my ass to get my beer. That buffalo got out one time. We had a six-foot barbed wire fence there and he went across that fence like it wasn't even there.

MB: She used to pal around with our horses. We had 12 Morgans at the time.

RM: What were you doing with them?

AB: Just raising them.

MB: And selling them.

AB: Elmer Bowman and I had a Mexican standoff out here—he was going to shoot me and I was going to shoot him.

RM: Why?

AB: Because he was running his cattle for years through here, feeding on those mesquite beans. He was bringing the cattle down off the mountain and then I had a horse tied to a fence waiting for him to come down because I was going to ride out there. I was going ride through the gate, but that damn horse jumped the fence. I was out there and he said, "I am going to run my cattle through your fence because I want them to feed on those beans."

I hadn't been back from Korea too long. I said, "Well, sir, I know you're going to shoot me, but you're the first one going out of that saddle." That's a true story.

RM: What did he say?

AB: We just stopped there and messed around for a while and he finally drove the cattle another way and went around us. After that, he got to be a good friend of mine. He'd come up here on a Sunday morning and sit out here on the patio and talk to us.

MB: That buffalo, Susie, would scare the cattle; and their horses were not used to having something wild so it was disrupting his whole herd.

RM: Are cows afraid of buffalo?

AB: Those were. They'd never seen one before. If they are raised with them, no problem.

MB: But the one that got loose, we never did catch it. The Indians chased it all over the country and finally they caught it.

RM: And kept it?

MB: They ate it.

AB: The Mexicans ate it; they had a fiesta.

MB: And the other one, Susie, ended up down at Larry Bolling's place with a calf and we raffled it off. They were raising some money for the Simkins—he had stomach cancer—so that went to a good cause.

AB: We had about 144 burros out here one time. They belonged to Joe Hielegers. He did a

lot for this valley. He got things done here and there; he had the Cotton Pickin' Bar. We were raising the burros for him and they were taking them down to the river and having burro feeds. And we had, what, four matched ones?

MB: They were black and white.

AB: We gave them to an old man here and gave him a wagon and they took up a collection for his traces and harnesses and everything like that and he'd drive that around town.

MB: We had a barbeque of donkey meat. The motto was, "Come to the barbeque—it'll be the best piece of ass you ever ate." [Laughter]

AB: Either that or you'll choke to death.

RM: What does it taste like?

AB: Great.

MB: Because it was fed on grass and everything, it was quite good.

RM: Like beef?

MB: It's similar.

RM: Can you tell the difference?

MB: Yes, there is a certain tang to it.

RM: Like venison?

AB: No, I don't like venison. It was more like elk. I took a great big quarter of it down to Pasadena when I went back and I took a big knife with me and I'd go around to the bars cutting off a piece of that burro for people in the bars. Boy, did I get a lot of free drinks.

RM: Did you ever eat any horse meat out here?

AB: Oh yes, we ate horse meat out here. Didn't you eat horse meat during World War II?

RM: We didn't, that I knew of.



AB: We ate a lot of it in Pasadena. It's a real red meat.

MB: Yes, there was canned horse meat.

AB: We got steaks and everything else of the horse meat. You didn't need any tags, you could just buy it. There was a lot of horse meat.

MB: I used to raise rabbits and the whole neighborhood would buy my rabbits because of the meat rationing. Al got me started with the rabbits.

RM: Do you have any more stories to tell?

AB: You know Abe Fox? Do you remember Foxy's in town?

MB: On the corner of Sahara and the Strip?

RM: Yes, that restaurant.

MB: He was down here on the corner one time.

AB: He bought a lot of property here—Fox Hollow, down at the bottom of the valley. He was down here messing around with mesquite one day and my tail water ran down—that was when it was a dirt road—and he got his wagon stuck. I was walking down there and I had a hat on and I had a .44 magnum, a big gun. I walked around the corner and scared the shit out of him. I said, "How long you been in here?"

MB: There was another time a young guy got stuck down there. It was in the wintertime and Al let his beard grow and he had this sheepherder's coat on and his hat and took his dog and his .44 magnum and he walked down there. The guy was taking our fence posts out to put underneath his car so he could get out. He looked up and saw this wild man and said, "My god, how long have you been stuck in here?" [Laughter]

AB: I'll show you that gun, it's big. That's mesquite wood.

RM: You're showing me your .44 magnum pistol. Did you make the handle?

AB: Yes.

RM: You did a good job with that handle. Mesquite is very hard, isn't it?

AB: Yes. That gun there weighs as much as a rifle. I've got the rifle that goes with that .44 magnum.

RM: Really? And it shoots. . . ?

AB: A long ways.

MB: I was telling Bob you used to stand here at the house and we had a bucket of water up there at the reservoir. . . .

AB: A five-gallon bucket.

RM: How far away?

AB: Oh, near a half a mile.

MB: And he'd hit it with that thing.

RM: You could do a half mile with that pistol?

AB: Yes. I'd load my own shells up; they shoot a long ways.

RM: I love your sign down on the road.

AB: "Don't beware of the dog, beware of the owner."

MB: We had some kids come in here one night when we first started and they were on their bicycles and yakking away and it must have been 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. Al walks out there and fires up over their head with the shotgun and you could hear the bullets zinging through the trees. "Oh my God, the guy is shooting at us!" They never came back.

AB: I've got a reputation around here that if you come in here you're going to get shot. Well, it keeps them away. And they're stealing all around us here. They're stealing quads, like that quad there. Bobby Bolling's ex-wife down the street lost two brand new motorcycles. They're stealing all around us, but nobody comes down here.

MB: And a chainsaw, gee. One time—this is a while back when the kids were young—we

had a pack of dogs that kept coming through here. Al weighed about 245 and then he lost a bunch of weight and his skivvies didn't fit too well. He got out there one morning and we're all standing back behind him and he's gotten his shotgun and is shooting at the tail ends of these dogs.

AB: Both barrels went off.

MB: Both barrels went off and his skivvies fell down around his ankles and we laughed so hard I couldn't do anything. The kids just never forgot that.

RM: Tell me about your children; what are they doing now?

MB: The oldest one is Cindy, Cindy Mueller; she has lived here with us since we bought the ranch, I guess. She was born in 1955.

RM: Did she marry a local fellow?

MB: Yes. They're divorced. And then Stephanie was born in 1957, and she married a fellow she met in college in Reno. Her name is Stephanie Cotton.

MB: And Craig came along in 1959. How I managed that, them being two years apart, I'll never know. Cindy is a brunette, Stephanie is a blonde, and Craig is a redhead. He is in Vegas. He is a wheel with Las Vegas Paving, a project manager.

RM: And he is working on the airport, you told me, doing the paving for the runway.

MB: And he worked on the Las Vegas speedway, the big race track for cars. And he was on the tunnel underneath the runway; he was superintendent. And the bridge there by what used to be Silverton.

AB: On Highway 160.

RM: Okay, that overpass on Blue Diamond over the Interstate.

AB: Two gals got killed there yesterday, right where you turn off to go through the canyon, Red Rock?

RM: That's on the Blue Diamond highway? That's a scary road to drive.

AB: We've lost a lot of our friends on that.

RM: The road over Mountain Springs, Highway 160, was done when you got here, wasn't it? I mean, it was paved?

AB: It was done in 1954.

RM: And so you didn't have to go up through Johnnie up to 95?

AB: We had to go 95 on 160, and that wasn't paved. That was a hard drive up through there.

RM: And anytime you had county business. . . .

AB: Yes, you had to drive that. I showed you that with that Matt Kusick house—that picture we showed you. It was a hard road to drive. Just think of all the kids living there who had to go to school in Vegas. Our kids had to go to Shoshone to school and that was bad enough.

MB: Cindy and Stephanie, I think, were the only two that went over to high school at Shoshone.

RM: And they attended the lower grades here in Pahrump?

MB: Yes, and when they built the high school down here, Craig went to it; he didn't have to bus to Shoshone. I used to get the kids up at 5:30 in the morning and see them at 5:30 at night.

AB: They did all their homework on the bus.

MB: I'd make their lunches and scoot them out the door.

RM: Oh my gosh, and they didn't get home until 5:30? That was tough on them, wasn't it? Talk some more about your early years here and the challenges you had to face to make a go of it.

AB: Well, you figure, you get in an area like this, we had no power, no phones, and no gravel roads. I mean, if it rained you were stuck.

MB: We bought surplus diesel engines, generators.

AB: To pump water with.

MB: And generated our own electricity. And then we had one out at the well.

AB: Yes, we had a Buda out there. You would go out at night and you could hear them running all over the valley. We had three of them running on the other ranch and the one running here. I'd go to bed and if one of them would stop running, it would wake me up that quick. We owned free-flow siphon tubes; you'd have to start maybe a thousand tubes over again by hand [if the pumps stopped]. I had two Mexicans working for us then. We'd have to go out in the morning and start all of those tubes again.

RM: Oh my gosh. And you didn't irrigate continuously, did you?

AB: Sure. You water cotton every other row. Cotton really doesn't take that much water. But grass, you've got to water that all the time. And alfalfa you've got to water once a month. So there was water running all the time some place.

MB: Down at the corner of Mesquite and Highway 160, there was an artesian well.

AB: Pechstein's.

MB: And that was a beauty; it is no longer.

AB: He dug another one this direction on his property about a mile down and the water ran out of there and they had a hell of a time. It flooded Mesquite Road and all the roads. They had to haul in crushed brick to put down there to stop the artesian water. On our ranch that we bought over there, we had a deeper well in Pahrump Valley, which was 1,100 feet. We went down to see if we could get artesian, but we were just outside the artesian zone and we didn't get it. We had to pump it.

RM: Where did you hit water in that well?

AB: It was down 50 or 60 feet, something like that. But it wasn't artesian.

RM: Did you have any artesian here?

AB: No. We had Six-Mile Spring over here. That's where Fremont and all the guys stopped when they came through here, right along the old Spanish Trail. I'll take you over there if you want to see that.

RM: I would like to see that, yes.

AB: Then they've got another one around the corner they called Bowman Spring. And when we first come in, there were all those Southern California Auto Club signs there. Some of them were kind of shot up but I left them there. Somebody got them; I wish I would have gotten them. They showed which way to go.

MB: There are big holes in the rock where the Indians ground the mesquite beans.

AB: Some of them are that deep; it took them 100 years to do that. I'll take you to show you it. The Indians who lived here lived off the mesquite beans.

RM: Is this one of the best mesquite areas in the valley?

MB: This is the last big row.

AB: All of the rest around are little dinky trees. I've got some trees down there in the bottom that are that big around.

RM: You're demonstrating something about three, two-and-a-half feet around.

AB: I've got an old one standing down there. I'll show it to you; it might be that big around.

RM: Three feet in diameter?

RM: Did you ever grind the mesquite beans and try them?

AB: We never did, but we had a friend who came up and got them and made beer out of

them. It makes good beer.

RM: But it was a big thing for the Indians.

AB: That was their staple. They made their tortillas and everything else. Down at the museum they've got a pestle they found in Pechstein's field. They ran a disc over it, but it didn't hurt it at all. It's a big pestle like made out of rock. Come on, I'll take you over there.

## CHAPTER FIVE

RM: Al and Lynn are taking me on a trip and describing some things.

MB: When we first came in here you couldn't walk through these trees; we had to clear everything out before we could do anything.

RM: We're talking about your yard, basically your yard by your house. It was so dense with mesquite trees you couldn't do anything?

MB: Right.

AB: They're dying.

MB: They've got that mistletoe in them; the birds brought it in.

AB: When we came in here there were no birds. That's a sticky little seed and it gets in their feathers and they spread the seeds around the trees. It's killing the trees. It gets into the sap of the tree like getting into your blood. When you cut it it comes back again.

RM: Why did the mesquites grow so well here, do you think?

AB: The water. Lynn and her father cleared the whole field off beautifully, like this. Now you can't get through it because of trees. We had horses back then and they would eat the mesquite beans and defecate out there and they left their scat, and all these little mesquite trees grew up.

RM: So the field is overgrown with mesquite trees now but before that it was a plowed field? Okay, now we're leaving your property road and going on to Mesquite.

AB: The pictures that show where the kids were standing waiting for the bus were from right about there, weren't they, Lynn?

MB: Yes, and this was all overgrown like a little tunnel of mesquites.

AB: I had a lot of mesquite trees in there I had to blow out with dynamite.



RM: Oh, my gosh. Do they have deep roots?

AB: Yes. See that little tree there?

RM: Yes. Is that one dying?

AB: Yes, it's dead, but all back through there are big, big trees. See how big that tree is?

RM: Yes. How old would you say that is, if you had to guess?

AB: Not that old.

RM: Do they grow fast?

AB: No, they grow slow, but they cut all of this off down here back in the 1800s for those kilns up Wheeler Pass.

RM: What were doing with them?

AB: They were making charcoal for the mines.

RM: So we're heading west on Mesquite.

AB: We're going to the rocks where the Indians ground these mesquite beans for hundreds of years.

RM: So you're turning off Mesquite to the south?

AB: Right. We're going down to a place called Six-Mile Spring, on the Old Spanish Trail. They stopped there back in the 1800s coming through here.

MB: The Bowmans used to water their cattle from the spring. I guess they had what you call a Taylor grant.

RM: Taylor grazing thing. What's this mountain, the one you climbed?

MB: I don't know.

RM: Have you ever been up in the Nopah Mountains? What's it like up there?

AB: There is no water.

RM: Right, that's the name. (*pah* is water in Southern Paiute.)

AB: This rock here is where the Indians camped and got the mesquite beans and ground them for their meal.

RM: Oh, my gosh!

AB: They ground those mesquite beans in these holes.

MB: To get that deep they really had to. . . .

RM: That took a long time.

MB: Yes it did.

AB: One time, a geologist from the University of Nevada came out here and I showed him where it was; he said it probably took them 100 years to do that. There is a little one there that they started.

RM: Does this spot have a name?

AB: I don't know. Now we're going to go over to Six-Mile. You can't pick those [arrowheads] up now; it is against the law. You can't pick up anything on BLM land. Boy, have they changed this place. This is the Old Spanish Trail here. Lynn picked up a bunch of bottles and stuff on it one time.

MB: Old beer cans.

AB: They tore this all up in here. I'll be damned. And there's a little mountain over there called Bowman.

RM: The little tiny one or the bigger one?

MB: The little one.

RM: There is a spring over there?

AB: There used to be. There aren't any springs anymore. That was the main one.

RM: How do the two of you see the future of the Pahrump Valley?

AB: Screwed up. You've got so many dumbassed people running this thing, they don't

know what they want to do with it and they don't how to do it. There are people running for office that have no background and they come in there and all of a sudden they've got a problem so they go out and hire somebody for \$100,000 to take care of it. It pisses me off. I don't go to meetings anymore.

MB: It gets into the paper and then there's no peace and quiet after that.

AB: You don't want to get your name in the paper. If you come up for something, people are against it and then they start on you.

RM: Are we on private land here still?

AB: This is BLM in here. I haven't been over in so many years; they've changed everything.

MB: Our daughter Stephanie, when she got her horse, used to ride all around through here.

AB: I don't even know where that is anymore.

MB: I don't either. Look at the junk.

AB: Yes, it's a shame.

RM: It's awful how they treat the desert.

MB: Watch out for that big ditch. There were none of these roads out here when we were here.

AB: They're dumping. I don't know where that spring, Bowman Spring, is anymore.

RM: But it was right here at the base of this little mountain?

AB: It's right in here some place. It's a shame they tore up Six-Mile. It was in there with the trees around it. All the old wood cribbing was in there last time I was over here. That's all that old wood cribbing they've got piled up over the side. Well, that's a shame, that they desecrated that Six-Mile. They should have left it just the way it was. We should have taken the signs because somebody else got them. We would have taken good care of them.

RM: Everything gets destroyed if somebody doesn't look after it. That's just the way people are. Did you ever get any flooding in here?

AB: Oh, yes.

RM: Where was it coming from?

AB: See that mountain there?

RM: Oh, the Shadow Mountain?

AB: In '83, that storm just sat here and rained like a son of a gun and you could see the waterfalls coming down that mountain. The clouds were about even with the top.

MB: Same over on this mountain, too.

RM: Wow. And it came clear down to your place?

AB: Oh yes, we had about a foot of water in our place.

RM: Oh my goodness.

AB: It's really a shame that they screwed that Six-Mile Spring up; a lot of heritage. There is Coleman's place.

MB: Oh look, he's got his house all built up.

RM: Were you guys here when Pop Buol was still here? What do you recall about him?

AB: He owned this 80 in here. Wasn't it 80?

MB: I don't recall.

AB: He came driving in in this Jeep with Rusty Horgan. We tried to buy this 80 and then old Rusty Horgan got mixed up in that and he kept going up and up and up on his down stroke, but we didn't have the money. I've been down to his place down there. And I'll never forget, he has an organ in there I'd like to have. Remember Doby Doc?

RM: Yes. What do you recall about him?

AB: His great big diamond pin in his work overalls out here, driving that Rolls Royce.

MB: I used to pass him on the highway and he'd wave at me and his diamond stickpin was sticking up there just above his coveralls.

AB: The bar down there at the Cotton Pickin' was his; it was brought around the horn to Vegas. I don't know what it is, a pizza place or something now. They had that bar in there with that original old mirror.

MB: Beautiful, beautiful cherry wood.

AB: It was painted white and all the gals got together and cleaned it all off. I threw a guy's head through it one time.

RM: Did it break it?

AB: No. But someone threw a beer bottle through it. That beautiful old mirror.

RM: That'd be the hazard of having something like that.

AB: It was sickening.

RM: Where was the Cotton Pickin'?

AB: It's on Calvada Blvd. You cross the street from 372.

AB: It looked like that field there. We've got a picture of Charlie standing in it.

RM: The mesquites are really part of the heritage here too, aren't they?

AB: Oh hell yes. The big salt cedars really decimate the water table; they probably take 1,000 gallons of water a day. Along the river banks, in some places the springs have no water at all because of those salt cedars.

RM: They're new, aren't they?

AB: They brought them over from Russia because they thought they were a pretty plant.

RM: And it's turned out they are a nuisance, or worse than a nuisance. Look at the size of that mesquite.

AB: I've got some that are bigger than that.

MB: I think we've got the last big grove in Pahrump or anywhere around. I'd love to irrigate this tree—now look at it.

AB: We've got a picture in there of this field when it was. . . .

RM: This is the field right here?

AB: Yes.

RM: Oh, my goodness.

MB: We'll get above these big trees; this was all the field in here, too.

AB: The horses would run out in here and they ate the beans and their scat. . . .

MB: And the cows and the pigs. These are all the young trees that have grown up.

RM: I just stopped and took two pictures of what?

MB: Of a field that we used to water. It was hybrid Bermuda grass called NK37 and a cow could gain a pound and a half a day on the darn stuff.

AB: High protein.

MB: It was fine-stemmed grass and they just loved it. It was easy for them to chew and they'd get fat as little barrels.

AB: There are at least six coyotes in here right now.

RM: Right now it's a mesquite grove, isn't it?

MB: Yes, and they eat the mesquite beans if they can't find anything else to gobble up besides dogs and cats.

AB: They've got a problem with a weed here called Russian knapweed. If it gets in the field and gets in the cattle or horses, it makes them go blind and it will make them go crazy.

RM: And where did it come from?

AB: Russia, and it came over as a flower, originally. It's very invasive. Up in northern Nevada there are hundreds and thousands of acres that are infested with this Russian

knapweed and they can't do anything with it. It's ruined some of the big ranches.

RM: Is it going to ruin the country down here?

AB: You've got to get rid of it if you've got it. The only thing that will kill it is Tordon and it costs \$100 dollars a gallon. We've spent quite a bit a money buying that stuff.

RM: And if your horses and cows eat it they'll go blind?

MB: And you can't get your hay certified if that's in it. I don't know who certifies the hay anyway.

AB: Watch out for the stickers.

MB: I have left more hair here.

RM: Yes, I can see that you would.

MB: I used to wear cowboys boots all the time because if you step on those thorns, you've had it.

AB: See the scat from the coyotes, see all those seeds?

RM: That is the seeds from the beans? Are there any rattlesnakes in here?

AB: There's a green Mojave up in here.

MB: Yes, we saw one. If I hadn't looked down to look at my camera I would have stepped right in the middle of one. I jumped way up and over and Al went and got the shotgun and we killed him.

RM: Now what's this—we're in an open area.

AB: That's our graveyard for our animals. You've never been down here, have you?

MB: Not for a long time.

RM: Is this a sterile area here?

AB: Yes, this is one of those areas I was telling you about. We have two grandsons that just tore this place apart. Over in there, they stole a truck, and the bed and everything out of it

is over there where we ran by.

MB: This is one of the pockets where nothing will grow.

RM: I wonder what it actually is.

AB: It's salt. I think the pH factor is really high on it. See where the coyotes dig? There is more scat from coyotes. There are some old shoes, boots.

AB: Have you got a good map of all the old ghost towns?

RM: Not really.

AB: I saw one that you put out that I didn't like.

RM: I've got some maps but none focusing totally on the ghost towns.

AB: Back in the middle '40s, after I got out of the Air Force, I got into riding around up by that dry lake out of Tonopah on the road to Bishop and Coaldale.

RM: I know that one, yes.

AB: I was driving across that thing with a friend of mine, Allen Hollenbeck, an older man, and we fell through that goddamned crust and had a hell of a time. We had a GI Jeep and it wasn't very heavy and we finally got out of there. We ran into some white petrified wood in there; it was really pretty.

MB: Our big irrigation well is right up here on the corner.

RM: Are we on your land here?

AB: Yes.

RM: What did you say the light on the mountain was?

AB: Saint Elmo's fire. That's all over any desert area. Her brother and I were out around Palmdale one night and we broke down in an old '34 Chevy. The motor sucked up a couple of valves and then down through the pistons, made a hole in the top of them, so we stayed out there in the desert that night and that Elmo's fire was all around us. It was spooky. We



were just kids.

RM: It'd be almost like ghosts, wouldn't it? Do you have any good ghost stories?

MB: Not that I know of.

AB: My mother had one. She was sitting on the porch in Randsburg and her dog—they had a little spot dog—went kai-ai-ing underneath the steps and then she saw this figure walk around with a ruffled skirt. Remember that, Lynn?

MB: No.

AB: I've never seen anything. Of course, I've seen a lot of things when I was drunk. I used to be a big drinker. [Laughs] I've seen a lot of pink elephants. As an old sailor, you did a lot of drinking. There is some of that Sudan baled up, coming out of the field. Now there is the grass.

RM: Oh, I see; two bales and one is grass and one is Sudan grass.

AB: Well, there are two grass bales, but if you open that up, it would probably be green.

RM: Is that this year's grass?

AB: No, last year's. It has rained on it. I've got to plant this in a year or so or I am going to lose my water rights. You have to do that every five years or you lose your water rights. I spend all of that money, pump all that water. One year I was pumping thousands of gallons of water on that Garland Ranch we own, the one up by the R-Bar. We were pumping thousands of gallons a minute. I figured we were pumping maybe 20, 30 million gallons of water a day just to keep the water rights. It is the worst goddamned law that I have ever seen.

MB: No wonder the lower end of the valley is getting all of those sink holes.

RM: And it is just a constant drain on your finances.

AB: Not only that, but why pump water when you don't have to, just to keep water rights? That is awful.

MB: And Nevada has been in a perpetual drought for years and years.

AB: It is a shame.

RM: Thanks so much for the interview and for the tour.

## INDEX

*1001 Things for Free*, 34

### A

airplanes, piloting, 10–11, 26, 31–32, 34  
alfalfa hay qualities, 18  
Alvin Road, 14  
artesian wells, 42

### B

bartering for hay, 17  
Bell, Johnny, 20  
Bell Vista Subdivision, 14  
Bells, Alvin Louis  
    Bells and Vaughn business, 2, 5  
    birth and early life, 1–3  
    borrowing farm equipment, 31  
    children, 9  
    confronting school principal, 19  
    construction, house, 12–13  
    cotton gin, working for, 14  
    dispute with Elmer Bowman, 35–36  
    first house in Pahrump, 8–9  
    flying hung-over with Fred story, 32–33  
    ghost story, 54  
    losing underwear while shooting story, 40  
    marriage to Marilyn, 4  
    military service, 4–5  
    Pahrump-Pasadena commute, 10–12  
    and piloting airplanes, 10–11, 26, 31–32, 34  
    pistol with mesquite wood handle, 38–39  
    property purchases in Pahrump, 6  
    reputation, 39  
    selling subdivision lots, 24–25  
    and St. Elmo's fire, 53–54  
Bells, Cindy, 9, 40–41  
Bells, Craig, 9, 40–41  
Bells, George Alan, 1  
Bells, Marilyn May (Meidel)  
    birth and early life, 2, 4  
    children, 9  
    clearing fields, 45  
    first house in Pahrump, 8–9  
    marriage to Al, 4  
    property purchases in Pahrump, 6  
    raising rabbits, 38  
Bells, Stephanie, 9, 17, 27, 40–41, 48  
Bells and Vaughn business, 2, 5  
Blosser, Marie, 18, 32  
Blosser, Ted, 7, 31–33  
Blue Diamond Highway, 40–41

bobcat/domestic cat interbreeding, 29  
Bolling, Larry, 14–15, 35–36  
Bowman, Elmer, 35–36  
Bowman family, 7, 46  
Bowman Spring, 43, 48  
Brown (principal), 19  
BT-13 Army airplane, 10–11  
buffaloes, 34–35  
Buol. Pop. 49  
Burnham. Ben. 5–7, 9–10  
burros. 36–37

### C

Calvada, 8, 24–25  
Cathedral Canyon, 34  
cattle, raising, 16–17  
Caudill, Robert F. (Doby Doc), 49–50  
Coffin, Lou, 5–7, 9–10  
Connolly, Etha, 17  
Cotton, Stephanie (Bells), 40–41  
cotton farming  
    award-winning cotton, 19–21  
    chopping cotton, 12  
    prices, 21–22  
cotton gin, 14, 20–21  
Cotton Pickin' Bar, 37, 50  
cow on harrow bed story, 17  
cows and buffaloes, 36  
coyotes, 30, 51–52  
Crawford (Crawford's Market), 33

### D

Death Valley Scotty, 1  
Depression, 2–3  
Doby Doc (Robert F. Caudill), 49–50  
Duke, Tom, 27  
Durham bulls, 16

### E

electricity, lack of, 42

### F

farm crops, 13–14, 16–18, 22  
federal controls on cotton farming, 21–22  
first house in Pahrump, Bells', 8–9  
floods, 49  
flying airplanes. *see* piloting airplanes  
Ford, Addie, 34  
Ford, Stanley, 7  
Fox, Abe, and Fox Hollow, 38

Fred's bar, 10  
Fremont, John, 43

## G

Garland, Willis, 6, 19  
generators, electric, 42  
ghost story, 54  
ghost towns, 53  
grass crop, 13, 15–16, 42, 51, 54  
grass hay qualities, 18  
Great Depression, 2–3  
guns and rifles, 38–39

## H

Hafen, Tim, 14  
Harris, Fawnie May, 1  
hay  
    alfalfa, 15, 18, 22, 26–27  
    bartering for, 17  
    certified, 27, 52  
    feeding characteristics of, 15–16, 18, 51  
    grass, 15–16, 54  
Heilegers, Joe, 36–37  
Hereford bull, beer drinking, 35  
herfaloes, 35  
Herscher, Herbert L., 6, 23  
Hollenbeck, Allen, 53  
Horgan, Rusty, 49  
horses  
    and Charlie Meidel, 9–10  
    horsemeat, eating, 37–38  
    Morgan horses, 17, 35  
    wild horses / mustangs, 8  
Hughes, Leon, 18

## I

Indians and mesquite beans, 43–44, 47  
irrigation, 10, 13, 26, 42

## K

Kusick, Matt, 41

## L

LDS (Latter Day Saints), 7  
livestock, 16–17

## M

Mankins, Bill, 27  
Meidel, Charles Oscar, 2, 5–6, 9–10  
Meidel, Marilyn May. *see* Bells, Marilyn May  
    (Meidel)  
Mercury, Nevada, 26–27

mesquite beans, Indians grinding, 43–44, 47  
mesquite trees

    beetles in, 27–28  
    Bells' grove of, 43, 50–51  
    charcoal for mines, 46  
    clearing fields of, 45–46  
    decline of in Pahrump, 43–46  
    mistletoe in, 45  
    seeds scattered by animal scat, 45, 51–52

mesquite wood / beetles, 27–28

**Mexicans working cotton**, 20

miners / mining, 5–7, 46

mistletoe in mesquite trees, 45

Mormons (Latter Day Saints), 7

Mueller, Cindy (Bells), 9, 40–41

Munroe, Maude Cook, 2, 6

mustangs, 8

## N

neighbors borrowing farm equipment, 31  
NK37 Bermuda grass, 13, 51  
Nopah Mountains, 46  
Norton (lettuce farmer), 22  
nuclear testing, 29

## O

Old Spanish Trail, 43, 46  
Owens, Bob, 17

## P

Pahrump, Nevada  
    airport, 11  
    bartering in, 17  
    Bells' first house in, 8–9  
    changes over time, 47–48  
    farming in, 10  
    future of, 47–48  
    heat in, 12–14  
    mesquite trees, decline of, 43–46  
    property purchases, 6  
    schools, 41  
    sheriff Ed Siri, 17–18  
    water in, 9, 23, 25–26, 42–43  
Pahrump Airport, 11  
Pahrump-LA Basin air route, 11  
Pahrump-LA driving route, 12  
Pahrump-Pasadena air route, 10–11  
Pasadena, California, 1–4, 9–12, 27–28  
pasture grass crop, 13, 15–16, 42, 51, 54  
Pechstein, Ernest, 6, 42–43  
Peterson, Ron, 17  
PETT (payment equal to taxes) money, 28

piloting airplanes  
  flying hung-over with Fred story, 33  
  flying unfamiliar Bonanza, 31–32  
  Navion plane, 26  
  Pasadena-Pahrump commute, 10–11

## R

radiation testing on animals, 27  
rattlesnakes, green Mojave, 52  
religion, 7  
roads and streets, 14–15, 40–41  
Russian knapweed, 51–52  
Ruud, Bob, 15, 20, 31  
Ruud, Jacque, 20

## S

salt cedar trees, 50  
schools  
  in Pahrump, 18–19, 41  
  in Pasadena, 4  
  in Shoshone, 41  
Shirley, Shirley, 7–8  
Shurtleff, Lester Hay, 6–7  
Simkins, Paul, 30, 36  
Simkins, Terry “Fig”, 30  
Simkins, Zula, 30  
Siri, Ed (sheriff), 17–19  
Six-Mile Spring, 43, 46–48  
snakes, 52  
St. Elmo’s fire, 53–54  
stories  
  cat/bobcat interbreeding, 29  
  cow on harrow bed, 17  
  flying hung-over with Fred, 32–33  
  losing underwear while shooting, 39–40  
Stubby (cat), 29  
subdivisions  
  Bell Vista Subdivision, 14–15  
  Belle Vista Unit 1, 24  
  lot prices, 24  
  regulations and requirements, 23–24  
  and water rights, 25  
suicide bridge (Colorado Street Bridge), 3  
Susie the buffalo, 35–36

## T

Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, 46  
Test Site, 26–29  
thefts in neighborhood, 39, 52–53  
Thompson, Erma, 18  
town incorporation and taxes, 28–29  
Truckee, California, 27, 29

## W

water  
  artesian wells, 42–43  
  floods, 49  
  irrigation, 10, 26, 42  
  non-artesian, 9, 42–43  
water rights, 23, 25, 54–55  
wells (non-artesian), 9, 42–43  
Wiley, Roland, 34  
Williams, Walt, 34  
Winn, Talford, 31, 34  
Woner, Frank, 22

## Y

Yucca Mountain, 28